

Your Child's Health

Heart Attack

Dr. Kitty Ferguson

Heart attacks in children? Impossible! Well, not actually. There are some rare diseases that can cause real adult-like heart attacks during childhood but that isn't what I'm referring to today. I'm actually going to talk about the heart attack that your child is creating now but that won't happen until he is 50 or so.

Research is showing more and more that heart attacks and strokes are being made in the Lego set. It also shows that the way to prevent them is to intervene during childhood. Getting healthy at any age is good for you but deciding at 45 to start jogging to prevent that

heart attack at 50 isn't the best way to go about it. (In fact it might even be dangerous so check with your doctor first.)

Now, what can you do. First it helps to identify the things that make one child more likely to have heart attacks than another. Factors proven to increase the risk include a family history of heart disease (especially under age 50), diabetes, inadequate physical exercise, high blood pressure, high cholesterol in the blood, cigarette smoking, obesity, and an abnormal heart tracing. Two thirds of school age children have at least one of these factors and 21 percent have three or more! Let's look at these factors and see what you as a

parent can do for your child's future.

A positive family history of heart attacks and strokes is alarming if there are lots of them and if they occur at relatively young ages. You can't change your genes but you can be more careful if you come from such a family. One of the inherited factors is a tendency to have too much of certain fats in the blood. Deposits of fat have been found along the arteries of very young American children and serious clogging of arteries of young men killed in Vietnam so we know the problem starts early. A blood test can detect people with this problem. Children with high levels two years apart are twice as likely to die of heart attacks.

Obesity is closely related to heart diseases. This is because it is related to four other risk factors: High blood fat, high blood pressure, diabetes, and inadequate exercise. More than 10 percent of school age children are seriously overweight. While

control and conditioning of the heart.

About 15 percent of white American children have high blood pressure. A few of these will be secondary to some other undiagnosed medical problem, about half are because of obesity and the rest are just because. The only way to diagnose hypertension is to take an accurate blood pressure with the correct size cuff. This should be part of routine well child checks. If blood pressure is high on several occasions it should be treated regardless of the age of the child.

In future columns I will talk more about weight control and exercise in children. One thing you can do is to keep salt intake down in your house. If your family must sprinkle then don't add salt during cooking. Avoid very salty snacks. Reduce cholesterol by limiting the amount of red meat to no more than 3 oz. a day in children. Drink 2% instead of whole milk. Use at

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It is true that the only way to get fat is to eat too much, it has been found that overweight children are much less active than thin children and may even eat less! The best treatment is to begin good eating habits before the age of six. After that it's really tough to change habits but can be done if you care enough. The real secret is exercise for both weight

polyunsaturated fats when possible. Those ads weren't all hype. If there is any questions about your family history the blood test for fats should be done and every child (or adult) should have regular blood pressure checks.

Dr. Ferguson is a Heber City pediatrician, a specialist in the care of children from birth of 18 years. If there is something you would like Dr. Ferguson to write about, address your question to Mountainland Medical Clinic, 30 South 500 East, Heber City* UT 84032.

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